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GOVERNOR UNVEILS NEW PROGRAM: COLLEGE CREDIT FOR TRADE APPRENTICESHIPS

(ATLANTIC CITY) – Apprentices in the State’s building and construction trades will soon be eligible to receive college credit for the knowledge and skills they build on the job, under a new program Governor James E. McGreevey unveiled today.

The plan, announced during the State’s AFL-CIO conference, will make New Jersey one of the leading states in the nation to let apprentices count their work toward credit at any of the state’s public colleges or universities. The program applies to apprenticeships in seven specific trades. There are more than 5,000 active apprentices in New Jersey, and thousands of other Journeymen, who could benefit.

“To succeed in today’s economy, each worker must make education and training a lifelong pursuit,” Governor McGreevey said. “This new program is part of our commitment to expand the training opportunities available to New Jersey workers. With college credit for the knowledge they gain as apprentices, these workers will earn a head start on their education – which will, in turn, encourage them to continue their college education.”

“New Jersey’s economy is one of the most successful in the nation. In the past 12 months we’ve created twice as many jobs as any other Northeastern state. Our investments in the workforce – in programs that give every worker a chance to build her or his career – are a key part of that success,” the Governor continued.

Governor McGreevey developed the plan in cooperation with the State Department of Labor; the New Jersey AFL-CIO; the State Employment and Training Commission; the State Department of Education; and other representatives of the Garden State’s education and labor communities.

There is no question that New Jersey’s construction industry is a source of rewarding jobs. The industry generates billions of dollars and employed 164,000 workers in 2003. Construction jobs paid between \$899 and \$988 per week. During this decade, different parts of the industry are expected to grow in employment from 6.5 percent to 11.9 percent. The median annual wage for all jobs in New Jersey is \$32,011, while the median wage for construction jobs is \$44,458.

Commissioner Albert G. Kroll of the New Jersey Department of Labor said such jobs pay well and are in demand because they require strong analytical, math, workplace safety, and technological skills – skills that should be aptly recognized in the world of education.

“In our current system, the distinction between academic and vocational education is misleading,” Commissioner Kroll said. “The time has come to create new bridges, rather than maintain old barriers, between college level knowledge acquired through apprenticeship training and the course offerings of New Jersey’s institutions of higher learning.”

“With the participation of every community college and most of the four-year colleges in New Jersey, the scope of this program is truly unprecedented,” Charles Wowkanech, President of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO, said. “Through this program, thousands of the workers we represent will be offered the opportunity to enrich themselves through college education, while businesses in this state, or those seeking to relocate here, will have access to the nation’s most skilled and highly educated workforce. Governor McGreevey and Commissioner Kroll are to be applauded for their efforts to implement policies which are both pro-labor and pro-business.”

Governor McGreevey’s new initiative will create a statewide model for awarding college credit for registered apprenticeships. At New Jersey’s community colleges, the credits would be applied to Associate in Applied Science degrees. At senior colleges and universities, they would apply to Bachelor’s degrees.

Agreements will ultimately be established for all of the building and construction trades, but initially for the following seven: Electrical workers, through the IBEW, by September 2004; and for plumbers and pipefitters (through the UA), air conditioning and refrigeration workers (through the UANJ), carpenters (the NJCU), telecommunication technology workers (the IBEW), and operating engineers (the IUOE) by January 2005.

Each apprenticeship program will be subject to a rigorous evaluation of its curriculum, teaching objectives and assessment tools, conducted by the American Council on Education’s College Credit Recommendation Service. The ACE is a nationally recognized leader in evaluating nontraditional learning programs for college-level equivalency.

Wednesday’s announcement builds on the McGreevey Administration’s commitment to help workers throughout New Jersey build better careers, by enhancing their access to advanced training and education.

Programs available through the Department of Labor provide everything a New Jersey resident needs to succeed, from the basic skills needed to apply for a first job to the latest high-tech skills needed to make a good career even better.

Since January 2002, the State has invested more than \$47.7 million in training grants to help more than 88,600 New Jersey workers. Initiatives throughout the state include One-Stop Career Centers that provide a single point of access for workers’ needs; and the website www.njnextstop.org, which provides career-launching information for teens.

To reflect modern needs, the State’s workforce development programs have been consolidated and streamlined under the Department of Labor, which will soon be renamed the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

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